

Green-Wood Heights Then and Now:

Mapping a Neighborhood at a Moment in Time

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Based on their research, students will create a topographical map of their neighborhood at a specific moment in time.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

My 4th grade class was studying the Revolutionary War. To help students understand the role our local community played in the Revolution, we explored the Battle of Brooklyn, the first battle of the War, which was fought in our neighborhood on August 27th, 1776. Students created a scaled-model topographical map of our school's neighborhood during the time of the Battle of Brooklyn.

We partnered with the historic Green-Wood Cemetery on the project, and used *Save Our History* lesson plans and activities. We also partnered with

representatives from the Cemetery, Studio in a School (a non-profit professional visual arts program), and regional educators from the NYCDOE, who helped students research the flora, fauna and buildings of their local environs. Historians from the cemetery and New York City, together with artists and authors, visited our school to discuss and explore the history of our neighborhood and the surrounding area during the Revolutionary War. Students visited nearby historic farms and Manhattan museums to discover the role our neighborhood played in shaping local history and to understand how it has changed over time. Students created drawings of the neighborhood based on their research and ultimately built a 5' X 5' upright topographical map with buildings and topography from 1776, clay figures depicting soldiers and farmers, and flora and fauna.

GOALS

- 1) To learn the significance of our own community in pivotal historical moments;
- 2) To learn that archival information is readily available and able to be interpreted for a specific purpose given a particular backdrop;
- 3) To use local government records to call attention to historical events that should be remembered and celebrated over time.

TIME REQUIRED

This type of mapping project can be completed in the span of 3-5 classes, including art studio sessions. We chose to tackle a far more intensive project, devoting 10 hours of class time, 40 hours in the art studio, and several research trips.

MATERIALS REQUIRED

Folders for art journals
Sketchpads for illustrations
Clay for models
Wood for map base
Newspaper
Muslin
Glue and staples to create topography
Paint
Craft sticks to make farms and other buildings
Plexiglass to cover map



Fourth grade students sit in front of the 1776 Green-Wood Heights topographical map they created.



PS 230 students staple newspaper to create their topographical map.

PROJECT GUIDELINES

Step 1: Select an event or era.

Our focus was on the Battle of Brooklyn and the Revolutionary War period. You may wish to select an event of local importance that students know very little about. Or, you can select a national event to frame a snapshot of what was happening in your community at the time.

Step 2: Research. Search census data, municipal archives and historical museums for primary source documents that show land ownership and usage during the time period you selected.

Step 3: Sketch the map. Once students complete their research and have a sense of the physical features of the neighborhood during the time period covered, provide sketchpads and ask them to draw maps based on what they've learned.

Step 4: Research local flora and fauna. Explain to students that plant life and animals, like neighborhoods, buildings, and people, can change over time in a community. Students can collect data from the Internet and

oral histories about the local flora, fauna and inhabitants of the land. A local historical society, librarian, or professional historian can be an amazing resource and is often willing to visit your school if asked.

Step 5: (Optional) Take a field trip.

Arrange a trip (or walk if possible) to a local museum, historical society, or preservation organization. Prepare students beforehand to ask questions (about what life was like in the neighborhood) that will help them develop their map. Again, representatives from these organizations might come to you, so don't be shy and ask. If you want to bring students into this process, have them write letters / emails or call their local museum or historical society.

Step 6: Determine the components.

Decide the exact parameters your map will encompass and make a chart version (use graph paper!). Have students decide where buildings, flora and fauna will be located according to their research.

Step 7: Scale your map! Decide exactly how much your “paper map” will have to be enlarged and assign student groups to work on specific areas by plotting coordinates. Have the students come together with their “scaled” square and assemble them into the larger map.

Step 8: Trace it. Place acetate over that larger map and trace it so you'll have something to transfer your image from when you get to the actual map.



A PS 230 fourth grade student traces the topographical map of her school's neighborhood from 1776.

Step 9: Lay the foundation. In the art studio, build a base out of plywood for the final size of your project.

Step 10: Build models. Have the students render their research and drawings into small clay models that can accompany the final large map. Since the map is scaled, the figures will be too large to be part of the map but they can be displayed nearby to depict what the figures would have looked like from that time period.

Step 11: Choose a map. From your research, find a topographical map of your neighborhood from the time period and enlarge the map to accommodate your final size. For the buildings, have the children create both a larger version and one that is scaled so it can be affixed to the map itself.

Step 12: Create the topography. Using crumpled newspaper and glue, have the students create the topography. Staple the crumpled, glued newspaper on the map and cover with gluey-muslin until the desired effect is achieved.



Step 13: Paint your map. Have the students paint the map according to their research and apply the buildings they have created. Give your map a title and affix a short paragraph describing the project.

SUMMARY

Since we live in New York City, there's a tendency to imagine that unearthing and interpreting facts about our past is an insurmountable task. We're overwhelmed with questions about where to go for historical data, who we might ask for help and what we might do with information once we have it. Teaching children to come up with ideas about where to look, helping them go out and ask others for help and to begin organizing and categorizing the data they find are all important components involved in learning to do research.

We made some unlikely friends in our travels! There was an unusually helpful woman at the New York City archives who searched dusty basement records for old maps of Brooklyn and guided us through the review of 18th century town meetings that helped to reveal land ownership in our neighborhood during the Revolutionary War. The director of the DOT for New York City responded to a notice we posted on a Geographical Information Systems listserv providing us with detailed digital maps of present day Green-Wood Cemetery and reading recommendations! New York Times best-selling author Mark Kurlansky came to our classroom to talk about

Left: A PS 230 fourth grade student creates a clay figure depicting a soldier from the Battle of Brooklyn.



PS 230 fourth grade teacher Donna Taylor.

his book, *The Big Oyster*, supplying the students with rich descriptions of what the city looked like in the 17th and 18th centuries.

By coming up with a plan and following it incrementally, the children had a final product that told the story of their neighborhood in 1776, a story that really came alive for them, a story that will quite likely stay with them for years to come.

Helpful Hints/Tips:

- 1) Choose a time period that is post-census! Many archival institutions do not allow students to enter certain areas or touch primary sources, hence research must be conducted behind the scenes by educators and presented to the children in the classroom for interpretation.
- 2) Establish a tight schedule working backwards from the due date so that there is ample time to make final adjustments prior to the project completion. Keep to that schedule!
- 3) Take pictures and record video during the entire process so that you have a record of student work and progress as you move along.